

WASHINGTON, Oct. 5, 2000 -- Delivery delays of the 2000-2001 influenza vaccine throughout the United States have activated a priority immunization program in DoD and the Coast Guard. DOD officials said the delay stems from two factors -- a slow-growing component of this year's vaccine formulation and production problems at two of the four pharmaceutical companies that produce flu vaccine. The Joint Preventive Medicine Policy Group under the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs developed the plan, which balances military readiness with the responsibility to protect DOD's most vulnerable populations. Officials said DOD and the Coast Guard will delay organized flu vaccination campaigns until early to mid-November, pending receipt of adequate vaccine supplies. They said currently available supplies will be administered first to operational military personnel, health-care workers with direct patient contact, and active duty and non-active duty Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System enrollees who have high-risk medical conditions. To the extent possible, these groups will be done simultaneously, they noted. Next in order of priority will be military trainees, groups in close contact with high-risk persons, all other military members in priority for deployment, other active duty members and mission-critical DOD civilians at overseas facilities, and all other beneficiaries. DOD used about 2.8 million doses of flu vaccine last year to immunize all its beneficiaries, officials estimated. For vaccination details, visit the TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil. For information about the vaccine delay, visit the Centers for Disease Control Web Site at www.cdc.gov. For information about influenza, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/flu/fluvirus.htm

Flu vaccination priority order is:

1. Forward deployed forces in high-risk areas such as Southwest Asia, Korea, Bosnia and Kosovo.
2. Ship crews under way for two or more weeks, including pre-deployment under way workup periods.
3. Special duty personnel who regularly transit multiple geographic areas or otherwise pose particular operational and epidemiologic risks, such as airlift aircrews and those who are deployed aboard a ship under way. This may include pre-deployment under way workup periods.

4. Forces on 24-hour alert status.

5. Military, civilian and volunteers health-care workers with direct patient contact.

6. Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System enrollees, whether or not on active duty, with true high-risk medical conditions including:

- Persons over 65 years of age enrolled in TRICARE Senior Prime at an MTF, or who otherwise receive the majority of their medical care at the MTF through an identified primary care manager or ongoing patient-provider relationship.

- Adults and children with chronic disorders of the pulmonary or cardiovascular system, including asthma.

- Adults and children who have required regular medical follow-up or hospitalization during the preceding year for chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes mellitus), renal dysfunction, hemoglobinopathies, or immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus).

- Residents of long term care facilities (where applicable).

- Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season. Pregnant women who have medical conditions that increase their risk for complications from influenza should be vaccinated, regardless of the stage of pregnancy.

- Children ages 6 Months To 18 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, and therefore might be at risk for developing Reye's syndrome after influenza infection.

7. Trainee populations, including basic and advanced trainees, academy students and officer trainees.

8. Other groups in close contact with high-risk persons, such as employees in long-term care facilities, household members (age 6 months and older) of high-risk patients, and military training instructors.

9. All other military members in priority for deployment.
10. Other active-duty members (including Guard and Reserve on active status) and mission-critical DOD civilians at overseas facilities up to age 64.
11. All Other Beneficiaries up to age 64.